FAA Facts

Federal Aviation Administration
2005

HOW DOES THAT WORK?
U.S. AIRLINE CERTIFICATION AND THE FAA

The Process

In order for a U.S. airline to begin flying passengers and cargo, it must meet certain requirements as outlined in the Federal regulations for transport airlines. The process of obtaining certification for commercial airlines varies depending on the size of the carrier.

A certification team is formed of members from the local Flight Standards District Office of the FAA, the FAA's Security Division and the FAA's Certification, Standardization and Evaluation Team (CSET).

CSET was established to assist local FAA Flight Standards District Offices process new air carrier certificates. CSET is dedicated to standardizing original certification and follow-up evaluation activities for air carriers operating aircraft with a seating capacity for 10 or more passengers.

Air carriers are responsible for operating at the highest level of safety and FAA inspectors ensure that they comply with Federal regulations.

The Air Transportation Oversight System (ATOS) ensures that air carriers have safety built into their operations systems, thus changing the way the FAA oversees air carrier safety. ATOS seeks a higher level of air carrier safety using a systematic, data-driven approach to address and manage risks.

Pre-Application

Initially, the airline applying for certification would meet with inspectors from the local FAA Flight Standards District Office (FSDO). The airline informs the FAA of how it plans to conduct business, such as transporting passengers or cargo, the routes it will be flying, etc.

The FAA informs the airline of all safety regulations and that the airline is responsible for complying with each regulation. The airline is required to submit a Statement of Compliance indicating that it is currently complying with these regulations.

Formal Application

The next step, a formal application, may take several months to complete. The airline would submit a formal application to the FAA for review along with a copy of its policy and procedures manuals, including safety, training, and operations manuals.

The airline also applies for certification with the Department of Transportation (DOT), and the DOT determines if the company is financially stable for operation.

Review and Management Team

It may take several months for the FAA to review these manuals to ensure that all requirements have been met. The FAA will return documents to the carrier for review and revision, and this back-and-forth process continues until all requirements are meet.

CSET assists the regional office in reviewing materials and in determining compliance with Federal regulations.

In addition, FAA regulations require that the airline have sufficient qualified management and technical personnel to ensure the highest degree of safety in its operations. This would include a director of safety, a chief pilot, a chief operations officer, a director of operations, a chief inspector and a director of aircraft maintenance.

FAA Inspection

In addition, to ensure that the airline has complied with airworthiness and operations regulations, the FAA conducts a thorough inspection of facilities, flight operations and aircraft.

This is accomplished through a multitude of tests both on the ground and in the air. In the final phase of the certification process, the airline's aircraft are flown through the proposed routes of operation to ensure that all systems are in place and in proper working order.

It often takes several months to evaluate and observe the airline in order to determine whether it meets the requirements outlined in the Federal regulations.

Certification

When all of the requirements have been met, the FAA will issue an air carrier certificate. Generally, the entire process, from application to review and inspection, takes six to 18 months.

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